Mural Arts: Giving a Voice to the Voiceless

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Mural Arts: Giving a Voice to the Voiceless
The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.

-Pablo Picasso
Mural Arts Themes

History of Mural Arts

Mural Arts Techniques

Global Murals
  Poverty
  Women's Rights
  Politics
  Community Needs

Local Murals
  Immigration
  Family
  Healing
  Community

Arcadia Community Murals
  Art for Art's Sake

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-Pablo Picasso
History of Mural Arts

Murals have been a part of global public art since prehistoric times; originating as paintings on the walls of caves. Mural, from the Latin term “murus” for wall, is defined as any piece of artwork applied directly to a wall or other permanent surface. From the prehistoric cave art in Lascaux Grottoes, France to the magnificent works of Italian Renaissance artists, murals have transformed the art world by visually conveying social values, events, and transitions of historical times. Artists such as Michelangelo and Da Vinci created murals in religious and political spaces; setting precedents...
In the period following the Mexican Revolution of the 1920s, “the great three” artists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros painted pieces to express disdain, elicit controversy, and signify hope and freedom. In the 1960s and 1970s, mural arts became popular in Chicago and Northern Ireland to fight racism, environmentalism, and other political and social issues. The history of murals arts is global; further uniting the international community through common themes of political turmoil, social justice, and eternal hope. Through public art, painters are able to highlight inequality, invoke change, and give a voice to the voiceless.
MURAL TECHNIQUES

In creating murals, artists often paint “a fresco;” meaning they directly apply paint onto the wall surface. When water and pigment mix on plaster, the paint and air interact to cause the color to stay on the surface. Mural artists also use tempera, oil, or acrylic paints and utilize various brushes, rollers, or aerosol cans. After completing their pieces, artists often apply varnish or glaze coats to protect their works. Modern technology has transformed the way murals are applied. Some artists digitally create “wallscape” that are printed and sealed on to a surface. Mural artists utilize multiple modalities to create meaningful displays.
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-Jeroen Koolhaas
Global Murals

"Giving Slums a Human Face"
-JR

"Inciting Political Change - The Art of Banksy"
-Banksy

"How Paintings can Transform Communities"
-Haas & Hahn
JR, a twenty-seven year old artist from Paris, is a mysterious figure who uses only his initials to protect his identity. A challenger of social issues through his work, JR refers to himself as a “photograffeur” as opposed to a “street artist;” stemming from the French term “graffeur” for graffiti. JR creates masterpieces on disregarded surfaces around the world; expressing the sorrows of impoverished communities. Due to his commitment to social justice, JR often rejects sponsorships and sells smaller works to fund his projects. Referred to as “Robin Hood” by some, JR will go to many lengths to ensure his work is
In 2011, JR received the TED conference’s annual prize of $100,000 to continue his humanitarian efforts of creating murals that convey the struggles of global communities. This sponsorship allowed JR to create “Giving Slums a Human Face,” an artistic effort bringing awareness to international poverty and social struggles. Through this project, JR photographed residents of impoverished communities and enlarged the images for posting on exterior surfaces. JR targeted areas such as Rio de Janeiro, Cambodia, Israel, and Nairobi; displaying photographs of the residents in various ways. This project encompassed the work from his “Face2Face” and “Woman are Heroes” designs.
The goals of JR’s “Face2Face” piece were to highlight the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In conducting research, JR realized the residents of this small area all looked alike and spoke the same language; identifying unity in a conflicted state. JR photographed the people of this area and placed the images “Face2Face” to help them understand their similarities. By photographing the people of Palestine and Israel in the same poses, JR hoped to instill peace, unity, and humanity in all citizens.
In order to draw attention to the violence women experience globally, JR crafted a project in which he photographed women and posted the images in struggling areas; such as Rio de Janeiro, Cambodia, and Nairobi. Because many women became victims of war, poverty, rape, and other crimes, JR wanted to honor their sacrifices and commend their bravery through his “Women are Heroes” project. Focusing on their eyes and faces, JR hoped viewers would acknowledge the overlooking presence of women in the world.
Inciting Political Change

**Artist:** Banksy

Banksy is a mysterious British graffiti artist provoking attention to social issues through his work and character. Banksy keeps his identity protected; hiding behind a paper bag in public and using email as primary form of communication. In keeping his anonymity, he created the organization “Pest Control” to validate his artwork. At age 18, Banksy began creating graffiti art on public surfaces; utilizing stencils as his signature tool. Due to his mode of creating art, Banksy developed a disdain for police and retreated into anonymity for self-preservation and social buzz.

Over the years, Banksy has increased in popularity; earning him a spot on Time Magazine’s World’s Most Influential People of 2010 list. His work is displayed all over England; however, many of the pieces have been eradicated. Banksy’s controversial style and eccentric characteristics make him an
Inciting Political Change: The Art of Banksy

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“All graffiti is low-level dissent, but stencils have an extra history. They've been used to start revolutions and to stop wars” (Ellsworth-Jones).

After creating his pieces, Banksy hopes to spread them as far as possible through his website: “I give away thousands of paintings for free. I don't think it's possible to make art about world poverty and trouser all the cash” (Ellsworth-Jones). Through his artwork, Banksy incites political and social change.

Banksy’s political images include a man holding a Molotov cocktail that turns into a bouquet of flowers; combining passion and pacifism. In another meaningful image, “A Vandalized Phone Box,” Banksy displayed a typical British phone booth destroyed by a pickax with blood pouring out. His images embody the political spirit of the times. In 2005, Banksy travelled to Israel and painted on a barrier built to stop suicide bombers. On this wall, he stenciled an image of a little girl releasing a heart-shaped balloon; which has since been copied in various locations around the world.
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Artists: Haas&Hahn

Artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahan, working under the name Haas&Hahn, began documenting the lives of residents in the “favelas,” or “slums” of Rio de Janeiro in efforts to learn about their community struggles. After learning about the influences of drugs, crime, and war in changing the neighborhood of Vila Cruzeiro, the pair decided to transform the area through art. Viewing the houses, Haas&Hahn decided to begin plastering and painting them blue. However, residents were disappointed in the color choice: “They said, ‘What did you do? You painted our house in exactly the same color as the police station’” (Haas&Hahn). The pair realized the influence of color and design in the community’s perspective of their environment. Therefore, Haas&Hahn switched colors and decided to paint figures such as a boy flying a kite. After completing the first project and receiving positive feedback, the pair returned to paint more houses.
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Completing their work in Rio, the Philadelphia Mural Arts project reached out to the pair and commissioned a similar project in North Philadelphia. In North Philadelphia, Haas&Hahn employed and trained local residents to help them create unique designs on each house. As Koolhaas states, “In a communal effort, together with the people, you can almost work like in an orchestra, where you can have a hundred instruments playing together to create a symphony” (Haas&Hahn). Through these projects, Haas&Hahn transformed urban neighborhoods by linking communities together in creating beautiful spaces for living.
It’s really about telling people who walk through here to look past tomatoes and celery and look past the grittiness of the market, to realize people who create the spirit of the space and recognize the struggle they had to endure.

-Michelle Ortiz
Local Murals

"Different Paths, One Market"
- Michelle Ortiz and Tony Rocco

"Fathers and Children Together"
- Ernel Martinez

"Finding the Light Within"
- James Burns

"Healing Walls"
- Cesar Viveros & Parris Stancell

"Independence Starts Here"
- Donald Gensler

"Family Interrupted"
- Eric Okdeh

"Above and Beyond"
- Eric Okdeh

"Common Threads"
- Meg Saligman

"Tree of Knowledge"

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“Different Paths, One Market”

Artists: Michelle Ortiz and Tony Rocco

In the Italian Market of South Philadelphia, food is not only the characteristic shaping this unique area. Artists Michelle Ortiz and Tony Rocco began changing the face of this market through their mural project, “Different Paths, One Market.” In order to visually display the rich history of immigration, culture, and family in this area, Ortiz and Rocco began interviewing and photographing the vendors who shape the market. As a resident of South Philadelphia, Rocco experienced the rich culture of this area and observed the market as a meeting place for tourists and immigrants seeking familiarity and reminders of home. Though the neighborhood was primarily composed of Italian and Jewish families, the market has expanded to welcome Mexican and Vietnamese immigrants. The Italian Market exemplifies the “melting pot” characteristic of America.
Different Paths, One Market

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"Sharing these stories with Tony and Michelle, it was facts, but when speaking them out loud, it hits you—it made me think of the 1920s and '30s. They didn't have the technology we have today. They didn't have the advantages we have."

- Anastasio (Mi City Paper)

After interviewing multiple vendors about their personal and family stories of immigration, Ortiz and Rocco began their artistic pieces. The pair selected eight vendors to profile in tarps constructed on the awnings over their shops. The tarps contain images of the vendors and meaningful quotes from the interviews. The artists tried to utilize colors associated with the market, such as dark reds, olive greens, grays, and tangerines. This project was very meaningful to the vendors and made them think deeply about their histories.
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In addition to the tarps, the artists also created a video on display for a few weeks following the initial installation. Not only do the tarps serve as a visual history, but also are functional in providing vendors protection from rain and snow. Rocco and Ortiz wanted their work to be purposeful rather than simply decorative. Through their project, these artists brought history, unity, and understanding to a community marked by culture and immigration.

“Sharing these stories with Tony and Michelle, it was surprisingly hard to verbalize them. You know the facts, but when speaking them out loud, it makes you realize how difficult it was for merchants in the 1920s and ‘30s. They didn’t have the technology we have today. They didn’t have the advantages we have.” - Anastasio (My City Paper).
In the criminal justice system, families are often separated and children lose contact with their incarcerated parents. Children become victims to crimes they did not commit. Responding to this issue, the Philadelphia Mural Arts program and the United Community Action Network at SCI Graterford Prison created the Fathers and Children Together (FACT) project. Through FACT, incarcerated fathers and their children have the opportunity to work on art projects together to rebuild lost connections. In 2015, FACT and the Mural Arts program created a mural on 54th St. and Woodland Ave. in Southwest Philadelphia. At the FACT sessions, the fathers and children worked together to paint one-third of the mural on a parachute. Leading the project, Ernel Martinez highlighted the importance of bonds between fathers and children rather than issues of incarceration and the criminal justice system. This piece exemplifies the importance of fatherhood, working together, and restorative through its...
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Finding the Light Within

Artist: James Burns

In Philadelphia, the annual suicide rate of public high school students is 12.9%, which is double the national average. This alarming number highlights the struggles youth face in a modern urban society. In order to draw attention to this social issue, artist James Burns partnered with the Department of Behavioral Health and other organizations to create a meaningful public art piece.

Creating this piece involved collaboration among various foundations as well as suicide attempters, survivors, and their families. This mural arts project also entailed workshops, speakers, and meetings regarding suicide prevention. The opportunity to discuss and create a public image about an important social topic helped youth and families through the challenges involved with suicide.

"I am in awe of the strength and courage of these folks to come out and bring this serious issue into the public eye. It is obviously not an easy thing to talk about and I am thankful to know that there are so many people who are willing to come out and get involved in the awareness effort and even more so to know that there is such a wonderful network of people who are regularly working and dealing with this type of trauma."

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In 2004, artists Cesar Viveros & Parris Stancell sought to create an artistic collaboration among victims & inmates to demonstrate the issue of crime in Philadelphia. Inmates at Graterford Prison, Victims of Crime, and Victim’s Advocates planned on working together to create a single public image. However, the groups had difficulty deciding on a mural design that would visualize the attempts at eliminating crime in the community. Therefore, the artists decided to create two separate murals side by side on Germantown Avenue in North Philadelphia.
The two images, “Victim’s Journey” and “Inmate’s Journey,” are collaboratively known as “Healing Walls” to highlight the hope for change in the neighborhood. The project of designing and painting these murals was documented in a film, “Concrete Steel and Paint,” by Cindy Burnstein and Tony Heriza. “Healing Walls” attempts to promote change and lessen crime in the community.

"Inmate’s Journey"
View of both "Healing Walls"
View of both "Healing Walls"
"Independence Starts Here"

**Artist: Donald Gensler**

In order to highlight the importance of supporting people with disabilities, artist Donald Gensler created the mural “Independence Starts Here” on the side of Hahnemann University Hospital in Center City Philadelphia. This mural features images of real people and highlights multiple disabilities through symbols. The artist incorporated braille and images of hands spelling out the word “Independence” in American Sign Language. Gensler also emphasized the diversity of individuals with disabilities by varying skin colors, ages, and genders in his image. “Independence Starts Here” serves as a visual reminder of the importance of promoting equality, acceptance, and support for individuals with disabilities.
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"Family Interrupted"

Artist: Eric Okdeh

Eric Okdeh’s mural on W. Dauphin Street in Philadelphia represents just one aspect of a meaningful project aimed to highlight the struggles experienced by incarcerated individuals and their families.
The “Family Interrupted” project involved the creation of a mural based on documentation of families’ and prisoners’ experiences. In multiple prisons’ waiting rooms, families could write and drop off personal anecdotes in mailboxes. After prisoners and their family members recorded their feelings, Okdeh developed a public image visualizing the struggles they encountered. This mural was painted on a “W” shaped building; allowing the artist to divide the image into sections. The purple section of the mural describes the thoughts inmates have about their families when they are separated, while the middle represents the families in prison waiting rooms before seeing their relatives. Okdeh made his project multimodal by incorporating scan codes onto the public image for viewers to add in personal stories to an affiliated website. “Family Interrupted” serves as a source of healing, connection, and peace for inmates, their loved ones, and the community.
“Above and Beyond”

Artist: Eric Okdeh

On the side of a firehouse in Philadelphia, Eric Okdeh decided to create an artistic tribute to social workers for their commitment and support of individuals encountering challenges. Before this mural was created, an image of firefighters was on display. However, after this mural began to tarnish, the community sought an image relevant to their experiences. In creating this mural, Okdeh interviewed social workers, children, and families to learn of success stories in the Department of Human Services. He decided to highlight the experiences of a boy named Julian; who fulfilled his dream of becoming a boxer with the help of DHS programs. Okdeh’s mural praises the dedication of social workers in helping individuals change their lives.
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"Common Threads"

Artist: Meg Saligman

Art serves as a link between generations. In Saligman’s “Common Threads,” the artist hopes to unite females of past and present by highlighting the connections among them. Modern females model historical figures in this mural. At the top of the image appears Tameka Jones, an art student at Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts when the mural was created. Her stance of looking into the distance conveys the idea of something greater beyond the mural. The theme of braids is also present throughout the image. In addition to Tameka, the china dolls and African American youth below her wear braids in their hair to further unite past and present. Saligman’s piece highlights the “Common Threads” among women of all ages and generations.
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"Tree of Knowledge"

**Artist: Michael Webb**

In order to honor the Eisenhower Fellowships’ fiftieth anniversary, artist Michael Webb created a mural on Market Street in Center City Philadelphia. Recipients of Eisenhower Fellowships pursue private projects to learn about various sectors. Jane Golden, the head of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, was the recipient of this distinction and used her position to study murals in Northern Ireland. "Tree of Knowledge" highlights the idea of sharing and obtaining knowledge from people and resources all over the world.

"Only justice, fairness and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace."

-Dwight D. Eisenhower

(Inscription on Mural)
"Only justice, fairness and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace."

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(Inscription on Mural)
Ars Gratia Artis
(Art for Art’s Sake)
-Latin Locution
Arcadia Community Murals

Glenside Bridge Project

Roberts Block Restaurant

Lewis Paint/Benjamin Moore

Primex

School of Education
"Glenside Bridge Project"

Artist: David Guinn

In the spring of 2017, Philadelphia-based artist David Guinn, Cheltenham Township, and Arcadia University will collaborate in designing a mural for the Easton Road underpass in downtown Glenside. Preparing for this event, Arcadia University has emphasized the importance of public art by hosting multiple events on and off campus related to this field. This series offers students the opportunity to learn from past projects, study the impacts of other murals, and identify the significance of creating a public image in
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- Friedrich Nietzsche
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Citations


